

# Setting the Stage for Children's Talk

Responding to Children's Leads  
Connect with the Classroom  
Preparing for the Unknown

## Overview

In this activity you will prepare to respond to children's interests and leads by practicing effective questioning, listening, and scaffolding strategies. It is an opportunity for you to reflect on (and try out) the kinds of questions and responses that interest children and get them talking without overwhelming them (or taking center-stage as the primary talker).

## Objectives

- To explore the differences between simple and complex questions.
- To build an understanding of the kinds of questions that make children think and use language freely and creatively.
- To practice generating broad, open-ended questions that have many right answers.
- To generate a list of talk-prompting questions related to the theme you established in the Section 3 Connect with the Classroom activity, and to develop a strategy for responding purposefully to talk that strays from that theme.

## Materials

- "Preparing for the Unknown Activity Sheet," below
- "Exploring the Elements of Style Activity Sheet," completed in Section 2
- "Creating the Context Activity Sheet," completed in Section 3

## Instructions

1. Review the chart in Part I of the "Preparing for the Unknown Activity Sheet," which illustrates the trajectory of simple to complex questions. As you read, consider:
  - Which of your children can respond to complex questions?
  - Which children need to be asked more simple questions?
2. As in the "Exploring the Elements of Style" activity in Section 2, you will again document and examine an activity in your classroom.
  - Choose a theme-related activity.
  - Depending on the resources available to you, you can either:
    - o Tape-record the activity.
    - o Videotape the activity.
    - o Have a trusted colleague observe the activity and take dictation-style notes, writing down specific questions you ask and ways that children respond or don't respond.
3. Practice asking broad, open-ended questions.
  - Examine the documentation of the activity that you created. Reflect on your role in the talk in the activity, and consider what you might have said differently to encourage children's talk more effectively.
  - In Part II of the activity sheet, write down the questions that you asked and the ways that you responded to things children said (both related and unrelated to the theme and the activity).
  - Restructure the questions you asked and things you said to make them broad, open ended, supportive, and appropriate to the child's oral language abilities.
  - You may want to look back to your answers to the reflection questions in previous *Connect with the Classroom* activity sheets as a point of reference.

4. Now that you've practiced looking back on your questions and responses, look forward. Create a list of broad questions you might ask children to engage them in talk. (The list can include some of the questions you restructured in Step 3, if you feel it's appropriate to revisit them in the classroom.)
5. Take the questions back to your classroom. Ask them at appropriate times and in appropriate contexts, and see how children respond.
6. Using the reflection questions in the activity sheet below as your guide, reflect on your experiences in this exercise. Have your thoughts and notes ready to share with other teachers taking this course in Share Ideas.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Preparing for the Unknown

### Activity Sheet

#### Part 1: Explore the Art of Questioning

Not all questions are equal: some are complex and require analysis and evaluation, and others are simple, requiring just a bit of knowledge. Take a moment to explore the chart below, which defines the levels of questions and describes the kinds of actions and skills that correspond to each kind of question. Keep in mind that there are other ways to categorize questions that you may explore in other courses, but this method is similar to Bloom's taxonomy.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS			COMPLEX QUESTIONS		
<i>Includes many who, what, when, where questions</i>			<i>Includes many how, why, what if questions</i>		
Know	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Synthesize	Evaluate
Recall facts	Grasp the meaning	Use learned material or information in new ways	Separate and understand the parts of something	Make connections or put together information in a way that creates something new	Make decisions or judge something based on certain criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define</li><li>• Identify</li><li>• Label</li><li>• List</li><li>• Match</li><li>• Name</li><li>• Recognize</li><li>• Repeat</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe</li><li>• Discuss</li><li>• Explain</li><li>• Extend</li><li>• Give examples</li><li>• Illustrate</li><li>• Paraphrase</li><li>• Summarize</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Construct</li><li>• Demonstrate</li><li>• Discover</li><li>• Predict</li><li>• Relate</li><li>• Show</li><li>• Solve</li><li>• Use</li><li>• Classify</li><li>• Collect</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compare</li><li>• Contrast</li><li>• Determine</li><li>• Distinguish cause and effect</li><li>• Infer</li><li>• Point out</li><li>• Draw conclusions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Combine</li><li>• Compose</li><li>• Imagine</li><li>• Suppose</li><li>• What if...</li><li>• Create</li><li>• Design</li><li>• Develop</li><li>• Plan</li><li>• Rearrange</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conclude</li><li>• Judge</li><li>• Rate</li><li>• Choose</li><li>• Select</li><li>• Measure</li><li>• Weigh</li></ul>

Consider the children in your class: What kinds of questions do you think you should ask each child?

Remember that as the teacher, your role is to prompt, support, and scaffold conversation and talk—not to direct it. Try to avoid overwhelming children with probing questions. Responding to children's leads is as much about respecting their personalities and their abilities as it is about building on their interests.

## Part II. Record Your Questions and Responses

When you have finished documenting a theme-related activity in your classroom, review the documentation, and answer the questions below.

1. List three theme-related questions you asked that you feel you can improve (because children didn't respond the way you hoped they would or for any other reason):

Question #1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Question #2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Question #3: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How can you transform the questions you asked to be more broad and open ended?

Question #1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Question #2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Question #3: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Some of the most interesting classroom conversations and themes emerge in unexpected ways and at unexpected times, from something off topic that a child says or brings into the classroom. Children use language and logic in wonderfully creative ways that teachers cannot always anticipate. But teachers can be prepared to respond.

List three things children said (either related or unrelated to the theme) that you feel you could have responded to in a way that encouraged talk or creative language use more effectively. Include your response with each statement:

Child Statement #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Response #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Child Statement #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Response #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. In the two situations you listed above, how could you have responded differently to encourage children's talk or creative language use more effectively?

Child Statement #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Response #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Child Statement #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Response #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Moving forward, what other kinds of broad, open-ended questions can you ask children? Include questions related to your classroom theme and questions that draw on topics children have brought up themselves.

Question #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Question #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Question #3: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Part III: Reflect On Your Experience

1. From this activity, what did you learn about the way you prompt and respond to children's talk?

2. What trends did you notice about the kinds of questions and statements children respond to?

3. How could the questions you ask have encouraged more creative language use in your classroom?